

Long Abstract

**Posthuman Autoethnography as an Inquiry:  
On the Path of Becoming a Trans\* Scholar**

Abstract: (No more than 50 words)

In this paper, I utilize a posthuman lens as an autoethnographic inquiry into becoming a transnational trans\* scholar. I perceive posthuman autoethnography as a disruptive approach for future higher education research to consider a wider array of analysis to challenge the centrality of onto-epistemological thinking that has long been dominated by the humanities of the Global North.

Proposal Text: (No more than 2000 words)

- Objectives or purposes of the inquiry

The aim of this paper is to introduce an innovative methodological approach—posthuman autoethnography—to uncover my path of becoming a trans\* scholar, moving from Taiwan to study in a U.S. higher education doctoral program. While traditional autoethnography interjects personal experience and centers human voices in ethnographic writing (Reed-Danahay, 2009) to understand cultural experience, it often overlooks other voices that co-exist with human bodies in this world. The posthumanist approach deconstructs the traditional anthropocentric view of the world that seeks to interrogate how human experiences are intertwined with, or extended by, larger non-human geopolitical, material, or ecological systems. Within this posthumanist inquiry, my work in autoethnography adopts a more deconstructive method that 'shifts the analysis away from the narration itself, and troubles the narrating 'I's' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008, p.308), by going beyond understanding this autographic 'I' from a static identity base, which often reinforces absolute poles of oppression (paperson, 2018).

Hence, moving beyond seeing trans\* as represented solely gender identity category, I am more interested in exploring how engaging with the transitive and prefixal nature of trans\*—seeing transness/transing as a process, a 'becoming with' that stretches across species, ecologies, and matter itself (Klumbyte, 2018)—can offer an analytic way of coming to know, and an affective collection of senses/feelings across geopolitical, familial, and educational borders and boundaries. In other words, by infusing posthuman autoethnography, the purpose of this inquiry is to uncover the possibilities and the intersectionality of trans\*—transgender, transnational, translingual, and transcultural...—on navigating their multiple trajectory of the way of becoming a scholar and how it relates within a broader lens of human and non-human interaction. In doing so, this paper seeks to understand the marginalized through the lens of

posthumanist relationality, aiming to promote new analytic approaches that can both challenge the centrality of Western-Anglo humanities thinking and contribute to a decolonial onto-epistemological perspective in autoethnography and higher education research

- The philosophical, theoretical, or practical argument and its bases

Drawing from posthumanist theorists like Deleuze, Karen Barad, and Donna Haraway, posthuman autoethnography reconfigures ontological thinking as rhizomic, open, and fluid (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), by asking 'how stories come to being' rather than 'what the story is' that most autoethnographic inquiries emphasize. This research, in particular, is grounded in Deleuze's (1988) concept of assemblage, which demonstrates how a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements work together without hierarchy and produce influences through spreading, in thinking with the possibilities of trans\* and intersectionality. Assemblages include the concept of subjects that are not humans and imply messages of multiple integrations, openness, and complex intertwining (Fox & Alldred, 2013). Educational studies (Allen, 2015, 2018; Coffey & Ringrose, 2016; Renold & Ringrose, 2017a, 2017b) have employed the concept of sexuality-assemblage to establish the capacities of individual bodies to act, feel, and desire, offering new insights to rethink sexuality in education research. However, the majority of current research is still centered on empirical cases in sexuality, which are interrelated but different from the non-normative genders that trans\* studies focus on theorizing (Keegan, 2020). Moreover, as posthumanist thinking is still an emerging field in education studies, most of the research were conducted from Western Anglo contexts, leaving a gap in autoethnographic work with those who have intersectional, non-Western, trans\* identities.

The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) has been widely used in higher education research, particularly in studies involving queer/trans\* people of color. However, in her paper, Puar (2020) argues that intersectionality serves as a tool specifically to diagnose racial differences, and that 'difference' continues to be 'different from,' which 'produces difference as a contradiction rather than recognizing it as a perpetual and continuous process of splitting' (p. 53). Puar advocate for a reconfiguration of traditional intersectional analysis through the lens of assemblage, suggesting that this integration can offer fresh insights into the complexities of identity and experience. Through this integration, Puar aims to enrich intersectional analysis by infusing it with a flexibility that can more adequately address the multifaceted and ever-evolving nature of identities and oppressions in contemporary society, thus moving beyond the static identity politics that has long been used in intersectionality and

educational research. Building on this, and considering what assemblages contribute, this study adds to the literature by integrating posthumanist assemblage thinking within autoethnographic work to understand the complexities of trans\*—both as a gender identity and beyond—from a non-Western, transnational context, focusing on their ongoing, ever-changing process of becoming scholar in the U.S. higher education institution.

- Literature and/or sources to support the argument/analysis

There are plenty autoethnography work which written from international students' perspectives, narrating their struggles of identity transformation and study abroad experiences on the path of navigating academia. For example, in her autoethnography, Andriani (2022) writes from the perspective of a non-Western female doctoral student who has been seen as 'Other' in the process of finishing her doctoral studies. She discusses how she navigates writing in a post-qualitative stance while dealing with the limitation of English not being her first language. Collective autoethnography from Chinese doctoral international students in Australia (Li, et. al., 2022), shedding light on the role of agency and hybrid identity, whereas a group of Korean doctoral international students in the United State (Kang, et. al., 2022), feelings of shame when reckoning their embodied knowledge of race and racism. However, majority studies focus on critical race theory or racial microaggression when it come to the international student research (Yeo, et.al., 2019; Yao, et.al., 2019), which ignore other intersectional possibilities as well as situated in a fixed racial category for discussion.

Hence, by using posthumanist lens of autoethnography, this study attempts to capture the fluidity, contingency, and the effects of various forces on the multiplicities of trans\*—as a transgender individual, Taiwanese, international doctoral students but also as an intersectional assemblage of gender-crossing, border-crossing, cultural-crossing, language-crossing and educational institutional-crossing. Posthumanism rejects the liberal humanist subject and acknowledges, as well as embraces, the ontological inseparability of the components of 'self,' 'other,' and 'environment' (Wilde, 2022) which allows boarder exploration of the relationships between the multiple self, other humans, and non-human entities, disrupting humancentric hierarchies and to include the entanglement in-between human, materiality, more-than-human bodies. This approach aims not only to decentralize the privileged discourse represented in the narratives but also to challenge the centrality of a specific kind of human—mostly White, Western, and Anglo—and their ontological and epistemological thinking that has long dominated the Global North.

Diary entries, text messages, conversations, poem and photos that fluctuates in the moment of writing, feeling, and transing will lead 'my work'— the temporary assemblage of memory, affect, things and bodies. I reconstitute materialist, relational, co-constituted, affective notions as a way to explore the multiplicity of the 'self,' situated in multiple texts and materials, in order to feel how space and time intra-act with affect, forces, and cultural boundaries, making

particular kinds of agential enactment visible. Moving beyond the unified, monolithic, and stable sense of self identity that psychology used to underpinned to what Nicolazzo et al. (2022) introduced ‘extraidentity,’ multiple selves are also entangled with the assembling formation process, crossing space and time, to ‘explore and embody the profuse, complex, and perhaps conflicting senses of selves [that trans\* or I] could have (p.147).’ Put it in another way, I see the multiplicity of ‘self’ as a part of assemblage, including autoethnographer-I, diary-I, text messages-I, conversation-I..., and the other I that affective in-betweens that ‘being entangled and expressing that entanglement (Wilde, 2022, p.1).’ Entangled within the rich tapestry of Taiwanese natureculture, where Austronesian islander knowledge is embodied through a geopolitical status of transcultural crossing, and seamlessly woven into Tucson, Arizona’s desert nature-culture—the very ground where U.S.-centered epistemological gender theories were generated. This piece captures the every moment, while I, along with other elements are all intra-actively plugging in this document on the path of becoming a trans\* scholar.

- Emergent conclusions or propositions and implications of the argument

There are several emergent conclusions based on using posthuman autoethnography as an inquiry to explore my path of becoming a transnational transgender scholar. Firstly, materials, unconscious/conscious stories, nature-culture, affect, and other non-human entities come together to assemble this journey and play an important role in interacting with my intersectionality, which has often been ignored in discursive research. In addition, posthumanist assemblage thinking allows for a more fluid understanding of autoethnographic stories, accounting for the dynamic and constantly changing nature of navigating the academic process across different temporalities. Furthermore, this experimental exploration of my journey offers both a posthumanist and a decolonial, anti-Orientalist, Sinophonic approach, engaging autoethnographic work in a more nuanced way in higher education research.

The use of reflexivity in traditional autoethnographic texts to unveil the researcher's epistemologies can be problematic. It often does little to disrupt the traditional hierarchies between the researcher and the researched. Instead, it may continue to privilege the ethnographer's voice and experience (Jackson & Mazzi, 2008). Moreover, in societies polarized by Western modernity, which rely on stable identities, there is a tendency to emphasize differences over similarities, often resulting in divisive grouping practices. For instance, Jackson (2013) highlighted that the social category of ‘woman’ is perceived to have consistent traits and remains distinct from ‘man’ due to this differentiation (p. 115). This perspective can extend to binary identity categories such as Western/Eastern, Black/White, Settler/Indigenous, Nature/Culture, and Native/Alien, which are prevalent in grouping individuals, especially in social justice research. Therefore, the implications of using posthuman autoethnography provide us with a way to disrupt trans\* as a fixed gender

category and to engage with gender and trans\* from a posthumanist, relational, and non-linear perspective, offering more fluid imaginaries for both education and autoethnographic work. This innovative approach provides new possibilities to explore one's stories not just by reflecting on one's experiences but also by creating and delving into more complexities within.

- Importance of the argument for higher education

To recap, using posthumanist ontology in educational research provides a more nuanced, dynamic, and open understanding of higher education, especially given its current interconnections with shifting geopolitics. There are several important implications of adopting posthuman autoethnography in future higher education research.

Firstly, challenging hierarchical anthropocentric thinking: The use of posthuman autoethnography as a methodological tool offers higher education an innovative way to engage with and explore individual narratives and experiences. Additionally, as posthuman autoethnography adopts rhizomic thinking, it challenges traditional hierarchical dynamics between the researcher and the researched in autoethnographic research. This decentralizes the dominant position of the ethnographer's voice and perspective. This approach not only aids in understanding the 'self' in relation to the 'other' but also integrates non-human elements into academic discourse, enriching the ways in which knowledge is constructed and disseminated.

Secondly, reconfiguring identity and intersectionality: By employing posthumanist assemblage thinking, higher education can gain a tool to understand and teach about identities in a manner that is fluid and adaptable to change, rather than fixed and binary. This approach also provides insights into the dynamics of navigating academic environments, especially considering the multiple intersectional possibilities of trans\*, thereby opening up a decolonial and anti-Orientalist space for a broader spectrum of knowledge and understanding.

Thirdly, moving from counter-narratives to holistic intra-action: Posthuman autoethnography enables higher education researchers to gain a more nuanced understanding of the material forces that extend beyond traditional discourses. It broadens the scope beyond mere counter-narratives to include a more holistic intra-action, examining how the humanities relate to the entire ecological system. This approach is particularly significant in the post-COVID-19 era and a period of global warming. Furthermore, it creates possibilities to explore how marginalized identities fluidly navigate within this ever-changing world, offering a comprehensive understanding that promotes inclusive and diverse practices and policies in the higher education field.

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